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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000302

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF A A/S CARTER, AF/SPG, AF/C,  
NSC FOR MGAVIN AND CHUDSON  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: CHADIAN REBELS LEAVE KHARTOUM AND EXPECT AN ATTACK  
FROM DEBY'S FORCES SOON

REF: A. NDJAMENA 60  
[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 273

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On February 26, polchief and poloff met Mahamat Hanno, a close associate of UFR President Timane Erdimi, and Mukhtar ben Yahya, a UFR representative and personal representative of UFDD/F's Abdulwahid Aboud. The Chadian rebels said they expect fighting between the ANT and their forces within the next two weeks. These UFR representatives reported that almost all of their leaders, including Timane Erdimi, have already departed Khartoum for the field. The rebels admitted that they have now become pessimistic about a negotiated political settlement with President Deby. They asserted that attacking Chad may be their only option. END SUMMARY.

UFR RETURNS TO THE FIELD AND FOCUSES ON THE MILITARY OPTION  
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[1](#)2. (C) Hanno opened the meeting stating that almost all of UFR's leadership has returned to UFR headquarters in Hajar Marfane, a small village along the Chadian-Sudanese border. Hanno stated that UFR President Erdimi and Vice-Presidents Hassaballah and Aboud have already left Khartoum, and that he will join them on February 27. Muktar ben Yahya will remain behind as the only rebel representative in the Sudanese capital. The leaders' return to the field is part of the movement's effort to focus on the UFR's military organization and "to translate our political program and new unity into our military organization." Hanno stated that within the next week UFR will choose a chief commander and that UFR's military structure will be integrated under one chain of command.

DEBY IS READY TO ATTACK US  
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[1](#)3. (C) Both Hanno and ben Yahya said President Deby is eager to attack the Chadian rebels. Deby's visit to Eastern Chad, the GOC's military buildup, and JEM's return to Chad are all signs that Deby is gearing up for a fight, claimed these contacts. They asserted that Deby ordered JEM to return to Chad to participate in the GOC's military campaign (as reported in Ref B). According to Hanno, 60 of JEM's vehicles reached Um Jaras on February 26 with another 30 arriving earlier in the week. Hanno stated that UFR forces did not engage militarily with any JEM force in the last week. (Note: This conflicts with JEM's account, as reported reftel A. End Note.) Hanno added that Deby, and not UFR, will attack first, but that UFR has been preparing for the battle and that "we are ready now."

ICC AND THE TIMING OF THE VIOLENCE

15. (C) Poloff stated that it is in UFR's interest to refrain from any violence during this period before and after the March 4 ICC announcement. UFR continually argues that it is independent from the Government of Sudan, but should it attack at this point, observers will believe that the GOS employed its usual proxy forces to lash out at its neighbor and to send a message to the international community, said poloff. Hanno replied that UFR is independent of the GOS, and that Deby - not UFR - will be responsible for starting the next round of fighting. He also claimed that unlike Chad, the UFR has never closely coordinated or fought alongside the Sudanese military. "People will have the belief that the GOS is using us to make a statement following the arrest warrant, but there is nothing we can do about that, and it is wrong. People will believe what they want to believe," stated Hanno.

PESSIMISTIC ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION

16. (C) UFR currently has no formal contact with President Deby or the GOC, stated these representatives. Even if UFR did have a dialogue with the GOC, it would be worthless without a negotiator and the presence of the international community, stated Hanno. According to these representatives, Deby has signed over fifty agreements with opposition and rebel actors - none of which has been honored. Additionally, the European Union has not yet responded to UFR's last letter delivered by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. "The EU is just too big and moves too slowly - we do not expect much from it," stated ben Yahya. Both contacts admitted that they

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have become discouraged about the possibility of reaching a political solution at this time.

17. (C) Despite the departure of UFR leadership and their pessimism about reaching a political solution, Hanno stated that UFR continues to seek a stronger relationship with the West. Erdimi has charged Muktar ben Yahya with staying in Khartoum and maintaining relationships with Khartoum's diplomatic community. Hanno stated that UFR still hopes to send a delegation to Europe in the coming weeks and would welcome the opportunity to meet senior U.S. officials there.

COMMENT

18. (C) Both Hanno and ben Yahya appeared rather glum, especially compared to their demeanor several weeks ago following much apparent progress on UFR's political program. The reality that more blood will be shed in Eastern Chad and along the Chadian-Sudanese border seems to be setting in for these representatives. Post will maintain regular contact with UFR's representatives during the critical period ahead.  
FERNANDEZ